8. Professional Dreams: Reflections on Two Javanese Classics

CHAPTER 8

Professional Dreams: Reflections on Two Javanese Classics

Mark Twain put it characteristically: "A classic is something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read." Few major works of the later era of traditional Javanese literature fit his words better than the *Serat Centhini.*[1] Ritually described as a masterpiece and, more interestingly (as we shall see), as an encyclopedia of Javanese culture, it has never been printed in its entirety. The only substantial published version, an eight-volume Romanized edition, appeared seventy-five years ago.[2] With a few notable exceptions, it has been neglected by both Western and modern Javanese scholars.[3]

Based on a paper presented in 1984 to the Southeast Asian Summer Studies Institute.

[1]According to Behrend, 98 variant manuscripts of this poem, in eight major recensions, can today be found in various public collections in Indonesia and The Netherlands. The oldest known version originates from a Cirebon manuscript of 1616. The fullest *Centhini,* a colossal work of almost a quarter of a million lines, was completed, he argues, in 1814. It is thought to have been prepared by a committee of poets in the entourage of the then crown prince of Surakarta, who later became Pakubuwana V. Tradition has it that the prince sent emissaries all over Java and Madura to gather every possible form of Javanese knowledge for inclusion in the final text. See Timothy E. Behrend, "The Serat Jatiswara: Structure and Change in a Javanese Poem, 1600–1930" (Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1988), pp. 79–84.

[2]*Serat Tjentini,* ed. R. Ng. Soeradipoera, R. Poerwasoewignja, and R. Wirawangsa (Batavia [Jakarta]: Ruygrok, 1912–15). Behrend believes that the initiative was taken by the scholar-bureaucrat Douwe Rinkes, then director of the Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen (Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences), who had the text prepared in Leiden, then sent to Surakarta for checking by Soeradipoera and his aides, and finally printed in Batavia at the society's expense. Behrend, "Serat Jatiswara," p. 89. The only other substantial Romanized version, appearing in four volumes sixty years later, covered barely half the material in the 1912–15 edition: viz., *Serat Centhini,* ed. Tardjan Hadidjaja (Yogyakarta: U.P. Indonesia, 1976–77).

[3]The most substantial mining of the *Centhini*'s vast resources is in Theodoor Gautier Thomas Pigeaud's encyclopedic work on the traditional performing arts of Java and

Where not ignored, it has been mined primarily for the copious information it provides on Javanese artistic and religious traditions. But the text also marks an important milestone in the historical development of Javanese political culture.

If the *Serat Centhini* can be said to have a story, it amounts to the following: After the bloody sack in 1625 of the prosperous Islamic, East Javanese port kingdom of Giri by the armies of Sultan Agung of the Central Javanese kingdom of Mataram, the three children of the vanquished ruler (two male, one female) are forced to flee for their lives. Hunted by the spies of Mataram, they are separated: the elder son, Jayèngresmi (later known as Sèh Amongraga) escapes to the west, while the younger son and the daughter (Jayèngsari and Rancangkapti) try to elude their pursuers to the southeast. The text describes their adventurous wanderings in a vain search to be reunited. They are, however, linked by the odd figure of Cebolang, who first appears attached to the small retinue of Amongraga and ends up marrying Rancangkapti. Cebolang is described as the only child of a revered sage living on Mount Sokayasa, who, however, disowns the youth on account of his inveterate gambling, thieving, and adulteries. Forced to survive by his wits, Cebolang earns his bread as a wandering musician, dancer, and what for want of a better word I shall call conjuror.

The fact that its leading characters are fugitives or outcasts permanently on the move means that the *mise en scène* of the *Centhini* is very different from that usually associated with traditional Javanese literature. There are no episodes on battlefields or in royal courts and capitals. The ruler of Mataram is merely an ominous, gloomy presence off stage. For the most part, the text's settings are a series of villages and rural Islamic schools (*pesantrèn*), while the cast of characters, male and female, are *kyai* (traditional Islamic men of learning), *santri* (their students), headmen, traders, professional musicians, singers, dancers, prostitutes, and ordinary villagers. The settings, and the encounters that take place in them, provide opportunities for the hugely elaborate descriptions of many traditional aspects of Javanese

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Madura: *Javanese Volksvertoningen* (Batavia: Volkslectuur, 1938). The eminent ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst quoted many short passages dealing with music in his monumental *Music in Java: Its History, Its Theory and Its Technique* [3d, enlarged edition, ed. Ernst L. Heins] (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973; originally published by Nijhoff in 1934 as *De Toonkunst van Java*). See also S. Soebardi, *The Book of Cabolèk: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Translation, and Notes: a Contribution to the Study of Javanese Mystical Tradition* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975; based on his 1967 Australian National University Ph.D. thesis).

rural life—folk arts, architecture, cooking, cultivations, ceremonies, fauna and flora, religion, medicine, sexual practices, and so forth—that have earned the *Centhini* its reputation as the encyclopedia of Old Java.

Encyclopedic Politics

Ann Kumar has drawn explicit comparisons between the rural social orders prevailing in Java and France during the eighteenth century. She has thereby signally advanced the conscious incorporation of Old Java's history into the larger history of the modern world.[4] I believe it is possible to extrapolate from her comparisons to reflect on class relations other than those between lords and peasants. An interesting point of departure is suggested by a glance at two encyclopedias—our own *Centhini,* and that of Diderot, d'Alembert, and their associates—composed within half a century of one another.[5] While it is true that the Encyclopédistes foreshadowed the rise to power of the French bourgeoisie, their immediate circle was of quite mixed social origins;[6] moreover, the specific, revolutionary character of their *Encyclopédie* has no exact parallel in the historical rise of other European bourgeoisies. For their project was to marshal a colossal, systematically organized compendium of all the multifarious knowledge accumulated by, and available to, the professional men of learning of their time. The animus behind it was hostility, not merely to reactionary *idées reçues* but also to the ecclesiastical and monarchical authorities behind them. Against the *general* (cultural and political) power of Church and Crown, Diderot and his associates mobilized a formidable coalition of *specific* virtuosities. In effect, the aim was to show that on almost any topic—from the nature of magnetism to the origins of language—the (mostly) commoner, lay cognoscenti "knew more" than their putative social and religious superiors. In this sense, the

[4]Ann Kumar, "The Peasantry and the State on Java: Changes of Relationship, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries," in James Austin Copland Mackie, ed., *Indonesia: Australian Perspectives* (Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies, 1980), pp. 577–99. For this essay she drew on several of her own earlier monographic studies, and also on the fine research of Robert Elson, Onghokham, Theodoor Pigeaud, and Bertram Schrieke.

[5]I take Behrend's 1814 dating of the full *Centhini* as reasonable, and 1777 as the date of publication of the final supplementary volume of the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers.*

[6]Montesquieu and d'Alembert had aristocratic backgrounds, though the latter was illegitimate. Diderot, Voltaire, and Rousseau were of bourgeois or lower origins.

Encyclopédie can usefully be understood as a weapon in the struggle between a professional, secular clerisy and the whole structure of hegemony of the *ancien régime*.

Now I think it can be argued that the *Centhini* reflects a parallel animus, albeit in a very different political, social, and cultural setting. One might begin the argument by noting three striking general features of this immense poem. The first is that it is thickly strewn with what look very much like entries in an odd sort of encyclopedia.[7] There are, for example, many passages, some several stanzas long, that consist purely of lists: of Javanese sweetmeats, edible freshwater fish, joists and tenons, theological terms, musical compositions, names of mountains, cloths, dances, and so forth. These passages have no syntax—they read like unalphabetized, poetic Yellow Pages. Furthermore, it is very hard to fit them to the traditional aesthetics of Javanese poetry, which was almost always meant to be sung. (An English parallel might be a song consisting, without irony, of the names of forty-five brands of breakfast cereal). Hence, one gets the distinct feeling that such passages are actually meant less to be recited than to be read (consulted?). In other words, if the Javanese reader (not listener) wished to check all the different types of Javanese cookie or gamelan composition, he could go to the *Centhini* and look them up. And the sources of all this knowledge (*ngèlmu*) are not priests, or sages, or noblemen, but virtuoso professionals and compilers.

The second striking feature of the *Centhini* is the way in which the text treats such topics as supernatural entities and sacred objects attached to kings and courts. For they are handled in exactly the same matter-of-fact, encyclopedic way as fish, flora, or food. Canto 85, stanzas 4–5, for example, offers the reader a deadpan catalogue of a score of typical Javanese ghosts and goblins, organized neither alphabetically nor in order of scariness, but simply to fit the prosodic requirements of the meter Wirangrong.

Third is the noticeable absence of any depiction of *kasektèn* (magical Power) being deployed by members of the ruling strata, or indeed by anyone else.[8] The significance of this absence becomes apparent if one compares the *Centhini* with the tales of the *wayang purwa* (traditional shadow-puppet plays), or with such royal chronicles as the

[7]The *Encyclopédie* already used the most easily accessed of taxonomic principles—alphabetic order—to order its entries. In the *Centhini* there is no ordering principle beyond the requirements of narrative and prosody. The only way to find an entry is to know the poem very well.

[8]See chap. 1, above, for a discussion of the Javanese idea of Power.

Babad Tanah Jawi. In the wayang stories the aristocratic heroes make the heavens tremble and the seas boil when they meditate; the arrows they shoot in battle turn into thousands of serpents or demons. One hero may fly comfortably through the air; another may simultaneously impregnate a dozen heavenly nymphs; still another penetrates to the depths of the ocean and enters the ear of a deity who is a miniature version of himself. In the chronicles one finds balls of magical radiance descending on the heads of those destined to become kings, mysterious couplings—over successive generations of a dynasty—with Nyai Lara Kidul, the Power-full Goddess of the Southern Seas, and so on. It is hard not to see in the *Centhini*'s refusal of all these marvels a discreetly Gibbonian iconoclasm.

What might be the social basis for the peculiarities that I have briefly adumbrated? Is there anything to be learned from comparison with eighteenth-century France? Two points seem especially worth bearing in mind. First, Diderot and his *confrères* were, in their own view, skilled professionals, men and women devoted to the mastery and development of particular types of knowledge. Second, thanks to the rise of print-capitalism in Europe already from the end of the fifteenth century, the importance of writers within the broader group of professionals was very high.[9] (This is why Diderot and Voltaire exemplify mid-eighteenth-century Europe for us, rather than the professional musicians Mozart and Haydn and the professional painters Tiepolo and Fragonard). By contrast, Java did not encounter print-capitalism until the late nineteenth century. This lateness did not mean that Old Java lacked a substantial professional stratum, but rather that, because print-capitalism did not arrive till the latter half of the nineteenth century, litterateurs had no special prestige or political position within this stratum.[10] Alongside (not above) them were ranged the architects who envisioned, planned, and supervised the construction of Java's myriad mosques, palaces, and fortifications; the puppet masters (*dhalang*) who over generations built the varied traditions of the shadow play; the expert musicians who created the panoply of Javanese musical genres; the adepts of the many branches of Islamic learning; not to speak of dancers, actors, sculptors, smiths, painters, curers, astrologers, magicians, folk botanists, martial-arts

[9]See my *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), chap. 3.

[10]One notes that the bureaucratic rank titles given to court poets and chroniclers were rarely higher than those bestowed by the rulers on senior dance masters and leaders of court gamelan ensembles.

teachers, burglars, and so on.[11] Such people were almost invariably commoners, but they were certainly not common people. Some were drawn into the service of royal courts and provincial lords, particularly if the exercise of their knowledge and skills required the backup of sizable amounts of manpower and capital (for example, architects), which only such centers of political and economic power could provide. Others preferred the freedom of the road—joining Pigeaud's memorable swarm of *zwervers en trekkers*[12]—peddling their specialities on the broader social market (for example, actors and teachers of martial arts). Still others, such as kyai and *guru ngèlmu* (teachers of mystical lore), would settle in rural retreats, drawing to themselves acolytes and clients by word of respectful or astonished mouth.

There is no satisfactory way to estimate the size of this stratum of experts as a proportion of the Javanese population in the later eighteenth century.[13] But it was certainly much larger than the ruling class. How far different kinds of specialists recognized in one another members of a common stratum is also impossible to guess. What is clear is that, in different degrees, they recognized that they knew things and could do things that the rulers could not. (Born to rule, the Javanese aristocracy had no need to develop specialized knowledges, and assumed, like English gentlemen, an autocratic amateur status).

[11]There exist a number of interesting manuscripts that treat the science of housebreaking with encyclopedic thoroughness.

[12]In his *Javanese Volksvertoningen,* pp. 35–36, Pigeaud observes that traveling players "were unquestionably part of the large group of vagabonds and wanderers which must have been a key element in Java's social traffic in olden times." Other elements he mentions are pedlars, merchants, *santri,* and *satria lelana* (banished or masterless 'knights') with their retinues, who were often "hard to distinguish from bandits."

[13]But the remarkable statistics collected by Jaap Kunst in the early 1930s are suggestive (*Music in Java,* pp. 570–71). At that time the population of Java and Madura was just under 41 million. Yet he had counted 17,282 orchestral ensembles, including 12,477 "complete bronze gamelan" in either the *pélog* or *sléndro* tuning, and 6,362 wayang sets of various types, mostly *wayang purwa.* Assuming conservatively that a complete bronze gamelan requires 10–12 skilled players (including reserves and apprentices), we can estimate the number of skilled musicians at about 12 x 12,000 = 144,000. (I take it that the same players would handle smaller, non-full gamelan ensembles). If we eliminate women (who in public rarely played gamelan instruments except for the *gendèr*) and children, this means a skill density of about 1 adolescent or adult male in 10. To be sure, most of these musicians were not wanderers but villagers who made their main livelihood from farming. Still, the depth of skill and talent is remarkable. Recognizing that most wayang sets were owned by *dhalang* and "played" only by members of his immediate family, we can estimate the skilled puppeteering population at about 15,000, or 1 in 120 adolescent or adult males. Again, only a minority would have earned their main livelihood from this skill.

To project these figures back to the early nineteenth century is obviously problematic. But I can think of no obvious reason why the proportions should have been lower, and given the rise of primary and secondary education after 1900, which began to take youths out of traditional apprenticeships, it could well have been a bit higher.

But because of the existing distribution of social prestige, economic resources, and political power the specialists were almost always forced to defer to, and often to depend for their livelihood on, such privileged amateurs. This general subordination did not mean that they were not proud of their virtuosities, merely that they were usually prevailed upon to conceal or cloak that pride. (I remember very well from the early 1960s, when I visited the decrepit court of Surakarta, how the elderly court musicians sat poker-faced through a long speech about the nature of Javanese music delivered by a no less elderly prince; only after the prince was out of sight did discreetly mocking smiles and sarcastic comments begin). The only medium that by its very nature would have permitted a conscious, systematically ordered coalition of various, separate, professional mockeries—the mass-produced printed word—did not yet exist.[14]

One might therefore think about this half-veiled class antagonism as a struggle over the "means of production" . . . of knowledge. It was a struggle that pitted gifted commoners with their various particularistic skills and ngèlmu against a royalty cum aristocracy with its generalized claims to sacral authority and kasektèn.

Sodomy and Conjuring

So far we have been dealing with broad and general suppositions. To try to make them plausible and vivid, we now turn to two topics that are almost never mentioned in contemporary discussions of "traditional Javanese culture" but that nonetheless are prominently featured in the *Centhini,* one of that culture's most touted classics. In contrasting ways they offer a peculiarly clear silhouette of the incipient class antagonism referred to above.

One of the characteristic *topoi* in the "anthropological" writings of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial officials and missionaries is gloomily pleasurable reference to the natives' incorrigible addiction to pederasty and homosexual sodomy. Dayaks, Acehnese, Balinese, Buginese, Javanese, Batak, Minangkabau, or Chinese—however much these peoples might differ in other ways, they were all said to share a passionate addiction to such vices.[15] This topos served to demon-

[14]I use "professional" here to refer both to level of skill and knowledge and to primary source of income and social status.

[15]For example, the noted ethnologist George Alexander Wilken observed that "pederasty [is] a vice universal among the Dayaks" (*Verspreide Geschriften,* ed. Frederik Daniel Eduard

strate either the primitiveness or the degeneracy of the population concerned, and the urgent need for civilizing, Christianizing, and otherwise uplifting them. Pederasty and sodomy also served to draw a drastic moral contrast between "abandoned" natives and good Dutchmen, who naturally regarded such unnatural practices with practised horror. (Needless to say, once Indonesia became an independent nation, the shoe went on the other foot: The repulsive vices were unheard of in the archipelago until depraved Dutchmen arrived on the scene). One of the agreeable things about the *Centhini* is that it shows, by the many examples it offers and its unconditionally Javanese technical vocabulary, that male homosexuality at least was an unproblematic, everyday part of a highly varied traditional Javanese sexual culture. (It includes, inter alia detailed descriptions of sodomy, fellatio, mutual masturbation, multiple-partner intercourse, and transvestitism. Heterosexual sex is described in exactly analogous ways; the *Centhini* is quite catholic—or should one say encyclopedic?—in its coverage).

It is precisely the commonplaceness of male homosexual relations that makes a particular episode of paired sodomies so instructive. The context of the episode can be briefly described as follows: Evicted from home by his father for numerous offences, including many adulteries with married women, Cebolang seeks his livelihood as the leader of a small troupe of traveling performers, the most important of whom is a somewhat effeminate young dancer called Nurwitri. The group plays musics of all kinds (but specializes in an Arabic-influ-

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van Ossenbruggen [The Hague: van Dorp, 1912] 3:389); the celebrated Islamicist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje wrote of "the general prevalence of immorality of the worst kind in Acheh," symbolized by the popular *seudati* shows, where the poetry sung was "paederastic in character" (*The Achehnese* [Leiden: Brill, 1906], 2:246, 2:222). The sharp-tongued physician Julius Jacobs, after visiting Bali in the early 1880s, observed many dance performances by young boys dressed up like women, and commented: "One knows that they are boys, and it is sickening to see men from all strata of Balinese society proffering their *kèpèngs* (Chinese coins) to have the chance to dance with these children, sometimes in the queerest postures; one is still more revolted to discover that these children, sometimes after exercising for hours in a *perpendicular* position, are compelled, utterly exhausted though they may be, to carry out *horizontal* maneuvers with the highest bidders, after being fondled by this man and kissed by that" (*Eenigen tijd onder de Baliërs, eene reisbeschrijving, met aanteekeningen betreffende hygiène, land- en volkenkunde van de eilanden Bali en Lombok* [Batavia: Kolff, 1883], italics in the original).

Discussion assumed a calmer tone by the end of the colonial period: see, e.g., on the Buginese and Makassarese, Hendrik Chabot, *Verwantschap, Stand en Sexe in Zuid-Celebes* (Groningen-Jakarta: Wolters, 1950), pp. 152–58 ("Homosexualiteit"), and C. Nooteboom, "Aantekeningen over de cultuur der Boeginezen en Makassaren," *Indonesië* 2 (1948–49):249–50. On Java and Madura, Pigeaud, *Javaansche Volksvertoningen*, pp. 299–304, 322–24; and J. B. M. de Lyon, "Over de Waroks en Gemblaks van Ponorogo," *Koloniale Tijdschrift* (1941):740–60.

enced ensemble called *terbangan*), puts on dances, and displays a range of *sulapan* (which we might provisionally translate as "conjuring tricks"). In the course of its journeys, the troupe arrives at the *kabupatèn* (provincial administrative center) of Daha and is immediately hired by the local *adipati* (lord) to perform. No less than his many wives, officials, servants, and hangers-on, this lord is enraptured by the skill of the players, particularly of Nurwitri, who dances exquisitely in female dress. After the performance the young star is invited to sleep with the eager adipati, who is described as having "completely forgotten the love of women" (*supé langening wanita*).[16] Nurwitri is matter-of-factly complaisant about being sodomized, pleases his patron greatly with his lovemaking, and is rewarded on successive mornings-after with presents of money and expensive clothing. A few nights of revelry later, the adipati's attention shifts to the more masculine Cebolang, whom he orders to dance in female dress. As before, music and dancing arouse the bigwig's sexual desire, and he has no difficulty in getting Cebolang to sleep with him. Canto 4, stanzas 54–60, describe how, and with what pleasure, the adipati sodomizes Cebolang. The troupe's leader is described as "even better in bed than Nurwitri" (*lan Nurwitri kasornèki*) and is rewarded proportionately in the aftermath.[17]

So far, so normal. The sexual relationship between the males appears closely comparable to that between many males and females. A wealthy, powerful, high-ranking older male enjoys the "passive" favors of a sexually attractive, low-ranking younger person, and rewards that person financially or otherwise. Then something weird happens for which, so far as I know, there is no parallel in any Indonesian literature. The adipati asks Cebolang which partner in the act of sodomy gets the greater pleasure—the penetrator or the penetrated. When Cebolang says "the penetrated, by far" (*mungguh prabédaning rasa / asangat akèh kaoté / mirasa kang jinambu*), the older man allows that he would like to judge for himself.[18] Whereupon Cebolang sodomizes the adipati. As it happens, things go very differently than Cebolang has promised. Partly because of the size of Cebolang's penis, the adipati undergoes an agonizing ordeal. His rectum is so torn that he cannot sit down the next day. Cebolang has to

[16]*Serat Tjentini*, canto 2, stanza 17, through canto 4, stanza 30. The quotation is from canto 4, stanza 29. Here, and in all subsequent quotations, I have modernized the spelling in the source.

[17]Ibid., canto 4, stanzas 54–60. The quotation is from stanza 57.

[18]Ibid., stanzas 74–84. The quotation is from stanza 76.

apply a special poultice to the fissure in order to relieve the pain. (This is the only example of painful sexual intercourse in the Centhini, something that may indicate the poem's "politics.")

The most immediately remarkable thing about the second sodomy is that the usual sexual declension is reversed: a young, attractive, low-ranking male is described as dominating an older, less attractive, high-ranking male. But more instructive insights emerge from a careful comparison with the first sodomy.

In that first encounter one notices the following details:[19] the experienced Cebolang has no trouble handling the adipati's penis. He is described as "supple and skilled in all his various movements" (*aluwes awasis ing satata taténing pratingkah*). "His adeptness" (*baudira*) in passive sodomy far exceeds that of his friend Nurwitri. He is in fact shown to be "actively passive." The pair is said to be engaged in a "sweet battle" (*adu manis*). The constant use of reflexive verb forms underscores the mutuality of their activity: "they writhed and wrestled together, thrusting in opposite directions" (*dia-dinia dinaya-daya / dinua-dua*). The adipati's sex organ is "squeezed" (*sinerot*) by Cebolang's practiced sphincter. The younger man's "response" is "no less" (*tan wiwal dènya kiwul*) than his partner's. At one point he advises the older man, in the politest *krama*,[20] to "calm down" (*ingkang sarèh kéwala*)—as if to say "if you want to be good in bed, you have to pace yourself." He is described as "exhausted" (*lempé-lempé*), but his fatigue is that of an accomplished gymnast after a strenuous workout. (The adipati is described as scarcely less tired.) When at dawn Nurwitri walks in on the pair and slyly teases his companion, Cebolang responds with a cheerful grin and wink, and the insouciant claim that "it was the same for both of us" (*aran wong wus padha déné*). Finally, one observes that the author intends a certain complicity between Cebolang and Nurwitri at the expense of the adipati. Cebolang "gives [him] a secret sign" (*ngeblongken*) to indicate that they have succeeded in hoodwinking the aristocrat. While the latter laughs aloud in dull-witted satisfaction at what he regards as his sexual domination of the two young actors, the pair have shrewdly achieved their ends: money, favors, full access to the women's quarters of the kabupatèn, psychological mastery of their employer (he is now set up for Cebolang's role-reversal trap)—and sexual enjoyment to boot.

These details show clearly that (a) Cebolang is (deliberately) de-

[19]The following quotations are taken from ibid., stanzas 56–60.

[20]As noted in previous chapters, krama is the polite respect level of the Javanese language.

picted as a virtuoso sexual professional (in the better sense of the word); (b) he is not lying when he claims that the penetrated partner may get more pleasure than the penetrator—the former simply has to have the right ngèlmu and experience; (c) he retains his masculinity throughout, responding to his partner as might a good boxer, wrestler, or dancer. True, his movements are so supple that the adipati experiences them as if they were a beautiful woman's, but Cebolang never psychologically "yields" to the older man.

The reverse sodomy represents a sharp contrast in almost every respect.[21] The adipati first yields up his social and political preeminence by permitting the young adventurer to address him in *ngoko,* the language level of intimacy and equality (*koko-kinoko kéwala*). Then he asks for knowledge, about which he concedes his ignorance, and in effect asks for instruction from an experience teacher. The text goes out of its way to stress the impressive dimensions of Cebolang's penis (in implicit comparison with the undiscussed size of his partner's). The adipati is described as "yielding utterly" (*anjepluk*). More significantly, he is explicitly said to have "forgotten his manhood" (*supé priané*) and to "feel like a woman" (*lir dyah raosing kalbu*). Recall that when Cebolang was being sodomized, we were told that *in the eyes of his sodomizer* he seemed like, or better than, a woman. In contrast to Cebolang's practiced acceptance of anal penetration, the older man proves incapable of bearing the initial pain. The "tears pour down his face, he whimpers for mercy" (*barebel kang waspa / andruwili sesambaté*). "Oh, stop . . . enough . . . please, no . . . take it out . . . ow . . . ow . . . please stop" (*lah uwis aja-aja / / wurungena baé adhuh uwis*). Indeed, he so loses control of himself that he involuntarily urinates (*kepoyuh*) on the mattress. Cebolang feels "touched" (*ngres tyasira*) and speeds up his thrusts to bring the ordeal to a quicker end. (Contrast this with Cebolang's suggestion that his partner slow down when being himself sodomized earlier on.) Finally, the adipati "collapses in utter exhaustion" (*ngalumpruk marlupa capé*), while the young man merely feels sorry (*sungkawa*) for him, and no mention is made of any fatigue. When he was the sodomizer the adipati was also worn out. Needless to say, Cebolang is also knowledgeable about the right kind of crushed-leaf poultice to heal the aristocrat's anus. And the scene ends with no cheerful jokes.

The paired sodomies, with each partner alternately taking the role of penetrator and penetrated, shows that Cebolang is the master of his

[21]The quotations in this paragraph are from *Serat Tjentini,* stanzas 74–84.

master. He is a skilled professional in every aspect of sexual intercourse between males, without ever losing his control or manhood. Indeed, it is precisely because he retains these qualities that he is able, with evident sincerity, to insist that the pleasure obtained from being penetrated is greater than that derived from penetrating. He forces his lord first into linguistic equality, then into sexual submission. On the other hand, the adipati does not even gain the upper hand when he is the sodomizer. And when he is sodomized, he acts like a virgin, or beginning student.

At the same time we should remember that our paired sodomies take up only a dozen or so of the thousands of stanzas of which the *Centhini* is composed. We are not dealing with a sort of Javanese Lord Chatterley's Lover. The adipati experiences no sexual awakening and neither loves nor detests his young partner. Once his rectum has healed and he can again sit comfortably, life in the kabupatèn goes on as before. Cebolang is eventually evicted, but only because he is discovered to be making free with the adipati's concubines. It is therefore difficult to believe that the double-sodomy episode is in any way a statement about sexuality qua sexuality, or for that matter about homosexuality. We may get a better idea of what it is really about if we take a brief, comparative look at conjuring.

As noted earlier, conjuring is a staple of the performance repertoire of many of the *Centhini*'s varied zwervers and trekkers. Cebolang is the first such figure to appear in the text, but his pyrotechnics, impressive as they are, will be topped by other adepts in due course. Regardless of who the particular "master" is, all the conjuring performances share certain generic features. They are always shows (*tontonan*)—in the sense that the conjuror and his associates are hired to display their talents, before audiences, and in the context of a larger set of festivities. They are always accompanied by music, often by specific kinds of dancing and dancers, and usually by ample incense burning. The types of "turn" fall into roughly three categories: (1) Inanimate objects are, for a certain period, made to seem as if they have a life of their own. For example, a rice pounder appears to thump up and down in its container, and a machete and sickle to hack and chop, without human agency.[22] (2) Various objects are temporarily transmogrified. For example, cones of cooked rice (*tumpeng*), or certain leaves, or young coconuts are covered with a *kurungan* (a hemi-

[22]Ibid., canto 3, stanzas 19–23; canto 37, stanza 332.

spheric-shaped wicker cage); when the cage is removed they have turned, respectively, into bouquets of flowers, turtles, and snakes. On the cage being replaced, then removed once again, these objects have resumed their original, true forms.[23] (3) Horrifying events are made to occur, then reversed. This category is of such interest that it is worth offering details of three typical examples.

In the course of some festivities, Cebolang has one of his musicians bound hand and foot, then placed, along with a wheel, inside a kurungan.[24] While the other musicians play the composition Kinanthi Wiratruna, and incense smoke swirls up, Cebolang and his transvestite dancers circle the kurungan seven times. When it is removed, the bound musician is free and riding on a tiger's back. The spectators flee in terror, trampling on each other in the process. The adipati stays in place, but he does ask Cebolang whether "the tiger is real" (*apa nora anemeni ingkang sima*). On being assured that it is not, he bids the young conjuror to "terminate it at once" (*yèn mengkono nuli racuten dèn-ènggal*). Tiger and rider are returned to the cage. On its second removal, there are the bound musician and wheel, as before. In another display, the audience-hall where the spectators are sitting is suddenly invaded by huge stilts (*égrang*) of fire, which appear to rush after and do battle with one another.[25] It seems as if the whole building is going up in flames, and almost everyone is thrown into a panic. Then one of the experienced old men present tells the troupe that they have gone too far and must bring the act to an end. A flick of the sash of one of the transvestite dancers makes the blazing stilts immediately vanish. It turns out, however, that in the stampede to escape the illusory flames a small child has been trampled unconscious.[26] The conjurors are now bidden by the same old man to repair the damage. Two of them proceed to lay the child out on a mat and with a big, sharp knife cut his body in half. When the boy's mother, hysterical with grief, collapses over the corpse, the conjurors behead her. The horrified audience, believing that what they are seeing is quite real, terrifying so, conclude that Cebolang's men have been possessed by evil spirits. At this point the two bodies are enshrouded, while the transvestite dancers circle them, strewing flowers from the garlands that form part of their costumes. Immediately mother and son are restored to life and health. The third example has two of the younger

[23]Ibid., canto 3, stanzas 1–18.
[24]Ibid., stanzas 39–48.
[25]Ibid., canto 48, stanzas 28–33.
[26]Ibid., stanzas 42–52.

players in Cebolang's troupe, Jamal and Jamil, performing a duel.[27] In the course of battle, Jamal's forehead is struck with a crowbar. When he collapses, covered in blood, his antagonist rushes up and smashes his head and body with heavy rocks. Again, the audience is frightened witless. Then, at the master conjuror's command, Jamal's corpse is wrapped in a long cloth and transvestite players dance and sing around it, accompanied by a small *angklung* ensemble and billowing clouds of incense.[28] A still-panting Jamal immediately sits up, very much alive and well. And, as always happens even when the most terrifying show has been put on, the audience in the end roars its applause. (Quite often, the combined effect of conjuring and its music is to arouse uncontrolled sexual desire; members of the audience grope one another's breasts and genitals and even engage in public intercourse).

What are we to make of all the conjuring, especially conjuring of the third type? To put it another way, what kind of ngèlmu is being deployed? Is "conjuring" even the appropriate term for these sulapan turns?

That we are dealing with a distinct professional specialization can be confirmed from two directions. First of all, the sulapan are neither supernatural events nor cases of possession. If one thinks of the wayang repertoire, the chronicles, folk tales—or even whispered gossip in today's Jakarta—the exercise of true Power (kasektèn) always has real effects in the world, and causes irreversible change. Kingdoms fall, princes and ogres are killed, bad village boys turn into permanent monkeys, bloody coups (successful and unsuccessful) actually occur. In contrast, sulapan has no prise on the world; everything always reverts to what it was before. Living people are quickly "killed" and as quickly resurrected. Leaves become turtles, then leaves once again. Nothing really changes. Each "turn" has the same lack of consequences as the dramatic sodomies we considered earlier.

But if sulapan and kasektèn are utterly different from one another, can the same be said of conjuring and possession? In one sense, they are obviously distinct. During Cebolang's show, the audience misunderstood what it was seeing; the horrible illusions created by the conjurors made it seem that they were really possessed. For possession, like kasektèn, does affect the world. On the other hand, a number of the turns performed by Cebolang's men are given specific names by the *Centhini—gabus, réog,* and *jaran képang,* for exam-

[27]Ibid., canto 37, stanzas 256–61.

[28]An angklung is an instrument made of suspended bamboo tubes which tinkle against each other when struck by the player.

ple—that even today refer to specific ritual performances involving trance possession. Yet if the external look of certain sulapan turns and certain forms of possession may resemble one another, their inner natures are understood as basically different. In sulapan, a commercial show, after all, everything is under immediate human control, whereas in possession human control yields, at least for the nonce, to that of the spirit world.

In the second place, the sulapan conspicuously involve a specific technology and technical vocabulary. The *Centhini* takes a great deal of trouble to tell the reader exactly what combinations of musical instruments, what compositions, what modes of dance, and what costumes are required for each show. The props are virtually unvarying—kurungan, incense, sashes of a certain type. Some of the turns have their own technical names. Perhaps most striking of all is the use of the word *racut,* which might be translated as "to terminate" (an act) or "to dispel" (a phantasm). It is also noticeable, from the examples I have cited, that there are always a few spectators (typically old men) who are not taken in. They may, like the adipati, be amused when the audience scatters in panic, but they make sure that things do not go too far. The players are then told to racut the apparitions back "into the bag." And how simple racut always is (almost like switching off an electric current), compared to the rituals and time usually needed to end possession!

Yet in spite of all that has been said about technique, we are not, in the *Centhini,* in the world of Kinsey or Houdini (though perhaps not far from that of Cagliostro). When Cebolang is being sodomized we are not told which anal muscles he uses to give the adipati such pleasure, or how he acquires his muscular control. Similarly, we are never taken backstage and let in on the actual methods by which sulapan's effects are achieved. Sometimes the reader is left in doubt as to how far they are effects at all. For while Cebolang assures the adipati that his tiger is not real, the text also describes, deadpan, the bisected spectator boy and beheaded mother as dead. Perhaps we should replace the word *conjuror* by *magician.* For the latter blurs two ancient meanings: the virtuoso prestidigitator, who employs ingenious but ordinary means to create uncanny illusions; and the dabbler in the real uncanny, who nonetheless uses his powers pointlessly, for the gratification of an audience. Seen from this angle, the skills of Cebolang and his fellow magicians occupy a distinct site in the cultural landscape of late-eighteenth-century Java. They are not the skills of a faker, but neither are they those of someone with the general, superordinate Power of kasektèn.

A renewed comparison here with eighteenth-century France is valuable. The decisive thing about Diderot's encyclopedia is that it was meant to inform. Its entries are lists with *explanations* about how the world works, and on what principles. Its purpose is to spread enlightenment, to the whole world so far as possible. But the *Centhini*'s lists explain nothing. They refer to knowledges, but these remain more or less esoteric. They can only be properly read by those who already have the necessary ngèlmu. Enlightenment of the ordinary Javanese, let alone the world, is the last thing the text has on its mind.

What then? Sodomy and magicianship may be sources of pleasure, but it would be difficult to argue that either is centrally important to the life of any society, even that of Old Java. I have stressed them here because they so conspicuously set off their master practitioners from other social strata. The sodomies separate the virtuosi from the Powerful, the magic tricks the same virtuosi from the populace: For the latter, the secrets of Cebolang's ngèlmu are as unfathomable as (maybe more unfathomable than) the kasektèn of their lords. The very uselessness, gratuitousness, of sodomy and conjuring helps also to discourage any easy hypostasizing of Old Java as a seamless web of interlocking functional roles or mutually reinforcing patron-client ties. (Other types of ngèlmu, such as puppetmastership or medicine, precisely because they appear useful and socially integrative, may cause the interpreter to let down his guard against *idées reçues*). Their luxuriant secular display in the *Centhini,* alongside so many other knowledges, shows that something new is in the air, a visible, if probably not wholly self-conscious, claim to leadership of the Javanese—so to speak the supersession of kasektèn by a coalition of the ngèlmu. It is significant, too, that Cebolang, like other adepts in the *Centhini,* practices his ngèlmu in exchange for cash.[29] The Old Java of lord and peasant is on its way out.

[29]See Peter Brian Ramsay Carey, "Changing Javanese Perceptions of the Chinese Communities in Central Java, 1755–1825," *Indonesia* 37 (April 1984): 1–47, for a pithy, informed account of the economic and social changes experienced in Central Java during the six decades before the completion of the "full" *Centhini.* The Dutch East India Company's 1740 annexation of Java's northern littoral and its military suppression, in the 1750s, of the endless wars of succession that had racked the island's interior since the 1670s had contradictory consequences. On the one hand, the restoration of peace permitted a rapid rise in agricultural production and commerce; on the other hand, it facilitated the more systematic imposition of taxation. The era was marked by the rapid spread of tax farms, usually managed by Chinese, especially in respect to opium, market taxes, and rural tollgates. Increasingly payments had to be made in cash (typically lead Chinese or copper Company coins). To be able to pay in this form, peasants had to mortgage their crops or sell a larger portion on the market. Hence a significant monetization of the Javanese economy by the turn of the century.

Professional Dreams

So far, so clear. Probably too clear. For I have treated the *Centhini* as if it were a mirror of society or a quasi-ethnological treatise, permitting us to infer that its pages more or less directly transcribe the life of late-eighteenth-century Java. Musicians of course really played their gamelan, dhalang surely puppeteered, and Islamic mystics definitely instructed youthful santri. But were there really Cebolangs who stylishly sodomized their aristocratic employers and made villagers flee in terror from the apparitions they conjured up? Who can be sure? Supposing, on the other hand, that the great poem reflects not so much reality as . . . professional dreams?

The gratuitousness of Cebolang's virtuosities can tempt one into regarding them as the last, superfluous, elements in a total inventory of "real" traditional life. But a wider overview of the *Centhini* shows us very quickly its dreamlike nature. The sexual life so vividly depicted in its pages already suggests something phantasmagoric. For while scores of couplings between men and woman of all types and ages throng its pages, only once, and in casual passing, is mention made of pregnancy or childbirth. (This is why the text's homosexual and heterosexual episodes can seem so matter-of-factly similar. Its interest is in sexual virtuosity—including, by the way, female sexual prowess—not at all in demography or social realism.)

But these are still larger absences than that of procreation. We observed earlier on the way in which, with the exception of the adipati, the Javanese ruling class is peripheralized, if not eliminated, from the reader's field of vision. More striking still is the invisibility of foreigners. Sèh Amongraga flees his royal home in Giri in 1625, by which time the Dutch East India Company had already established its imperial Asian headquarters in Batavia (1619), a mere 450 crow-miles west along Java's northern shore. By the time of the *Centhini's* final compilation the Dutch had been in Java for two centuries—but only a few Dutch loanwords trace their presence in the text. Nothing in its pages hints at the wars that raged between the 1670s and the 1750s, in which, for the first time in Java's history, it was ravaged not merely by Dutch and Javanese, but by Buginese condottieri, Madurese warlords, and Balinese mercenaries. There is not the slightest acknowledgment that, since 1740, Java's north-shore ports had all passed "legally" into Company hands; or that conquering Mataram had long since splintered into three small and feeble interior principalities, all of whose

rulers were on the Company's payroll.[30] No wars, no plagues, no taxation, no corvée, no death.

On the contrary, for most of the *Centhini* Java manifests itself as a phantasmagoric utopia: a proliferation of prosperous, contented, tolerant, politically autonomous, sexually sophisticated rural communities through which professionals are free to roam. As they wander, they display their knowledge to the populace and to each other and are regarded with unrivalrous respect and even cheerful awe. There is no political intrigue, no fear, no kowtowing to noble ignoramuses, and no humiliating dependence on incompetent, venal rulers.[31]

It is just the character of this "perfect Java," benignly coordinated by its specialist virtuosi, that reveals the limits of the *Centhini*'s embryo radicalism. Cebolang may sexually master his master and make free with the latter's wives and concubines, but his mastery is that of the conjuror. As noted earlier, when the adipati's rectum heals, life reverts to what it was before the pair climbed into bed. Nothing changes. The benignity of the professionals is the benignity of men who are masters of *traditional* knowledge. It contrasts powerfully with the agreeable malignity of the *philosophes,* whose knowledge was anything but traditional, was indeed implicitly or explicitly revolutionary. In Java, the perfect society is pre–ancien régime; in France, it will come with the ancien régime's supersession.

[30]On the feckless politics of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Central Java, the best studies are Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Jogjakarta under Sultan Mangkubumi, 1749–1792* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Ann Kumar, "Javanese Court Society and Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century: The Record of a Lady Soldier. Part I: The Religious, Social and Economic Life of the Court," *Indonesia* 29 (April 1980): 1–46; and Peter Brian Ramsay Carey, ed., *Babad Dipanegara: An Account of the Outbreak of the Java War (1825–1830)* (Kuala Lumpur: Art Printers, 1981).

[31]Nothing better reveals the Louis Seize character of Java's surviving dynasts—including the employers of the *Centhini*'s composers—than that they did nothing creative to exploit the disasters that overwhelmed the East India Company and the United Provinces after 1780, when the latter became involved in the wars between England, France, and the young United States. In 1795, French revolutionary armies occupied the Low Countries and established the Batavian Republic under its aegis, and London responded by, inter alia, seizing Ceylon from the Company. In 1798 the Company, already bankrupt for some years, was taken over by the Batavian Republic, which assumed its 143 million guilder debt. (Cf. Clive Day, *The Policy and Administration of the Dutch in Java* [London: Macmillan, 1904], pp. 80–81.) In 1806, Napoleon made his younger brother Louis the first-ever king of the Lowlands, but in 1810 dismissed him for his "manie d'humanité" and peremptorily absorbed the realm into metropolitan France. London retorted by seizing, by 1811, all overseas Dutch possessions, including Java, which fell to Stamford Raffles's men in that year without a struggle. A brief, informative account of these developments can be found in Bernard Hubertus Maria Vlekke, *Nusantara: A History of Indonesia* (Brussels: Editions A. Manteau, 1961), chap. 11. The source for Napoleon's characteristic *mot* is Simon Schama's wonderful *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780–1813*. (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 543.

The very poetics of the *Centhini* underscore its political stance, which, most of the time, wishes away the ruling class and foreign oppressors, rather than assaulting them. Its tone is invariably cool, sweet, smiling—never alienated, furious, or despairing. Its composers display, without false modesty, absolute control of all the stylistic forms, metrical varieties, and sophisticated rhetorical devices then available in Javanese literary culture. But this awesome control is never used ironically; it functions, almost always, to align form and content.

The *Suluk Gatholoco*

If the composition of the full *Centhini* was completed in 1814, as Behrend plausibly argues, then this may have been the last possible historical moment in which such a vast, sweet, and controlled Javanese masterpiece could appear. For in 1812 Stamford Raffles's men marched into Yogyakarta, deposed the sultan, and divided the territory into two microprincipalities, as the East India Company had done in neighboring Surakarta in the 1750s. Moreover, in all four principalities he seized control of the rulers' financial lifeline, the taxfarms, running them henceforth from Batavia.[32] In 1816, as a result of a complex deal emerging from the Congress of Vienna—whereby William of Orange was made the first monarch in his line (succeeding Louis Bonaparte) and was granted the Company's possessions in the Indies by way of compensation for permanent British seizure of Ceylon, the Cape, and other valuable territories—the Dutch took over again from Raffles. Economic and political conditions deteriorated rapidly in Central Java, leading to the outbreak of Prince Diponegoro's rebellion in 1825 and the ensuing five-year Java War, which brought devastation to much of the region. The high cost of the war, and the Netherlands' own near-bankruptcy (the result of the exactions of the Napoleonic era and Belgium's secession in 1830) led to the installation in that year of the brutally exploitative Cultivation System (Cultuurstelsel), which between 1831 and 1877 netted the Dutch treasury as much as 823 million guilders.[33] To ensure no further political trouble, Batavia parked on Central Java's minithrones a series of utterly pliable, mediocre, fainéant princelings. In this long process kasektèn

[32]See Carey, "Changing Javanese Perceptions," sections 4, 5.

[33]Far and away the best study of the political and economic aspects of the Cultivation System is Cornelis Fasseur, *Kultuurstelsel en Koloniale Baten, De Nederlandse Exploitatie van Java, 1840–1860* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1975).

and its putative bearers lost more and more credibility, to the point that in 1873 the last court poet of Surakarta, R. Ng. Ronggawarsita, wrote despairingly on his deathbed that there was "no example left."[34]

This background may help to explain the astonishing contrast between the *Centhini* and Javanese culture's next great phantasmagoria, the *Suluk Gatholoco*. Internal evidence makes it clear that this long poem was composed sometime between 1854 and 1873 (most likely in the 1860s)—probably by a single, anonymous author.[35] If the *Suluk Gatholoco* is a classic, it is nonetheless one of the underground kind. When, in 1873, the eminent missionary-scholar Poensen brought a (heavily truncated) version of the poem to the light of printed day, he commented:

> From a literary point of view, the text has very little value. . . . But if we look more carefully at its spirit, then the writer strikes us—with his conceptions of honor and virtue, and his sensible views on such things as what foods are permissible for human beings to eat—as very much a man of the world, wholly lacking in the deep religious strain that characterizes such works as the Wulang Rèh, the Sèh Tĕkawardi, etc., and thereby also lacking their cultivation and breeding. In fact, he often arouses our disgust, since he does not refrain from committing the most trivial things to paper, and in the grossest way goes into detail about matters which it is not decent to mention.[36]

This sketch of a sort of third-rate Javanese Pantagruel cut no ice with Snouck Hurgronje, grandest of colonial scholar-panjandrums, who denounced the poem as "the heretical dreams of an undoubtedly

[34]See chap. 6, above.

[35]At canto 7, stanza 52, the poem mentions what it calls *rispis pérak*. Rispis is clearly a Javanization of *recepis*, a special scrip introduced by Governor-General Rochussen on February 4, 1846, in a desperate attempt to remedy the financial and currency chaos bequeathed by his predecessors. Convertible at a fixed rate with Holland's silver-based coinage, the recepis proved to be the first stable colonial currency in the Indies. By the Currency Law of 1854 it was formally replaced with a silver guilder, though it was not finally withdrawn from circulation until 1861. See "Muntwezen," in *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (The Hague/Leiden: Nijhoff/Brill, 1918), 2:793–811, esp. at pp. 803–4. Rispis pérak (silver rispis) must refer to the silver coins replacing the paper recepis between 1854 and 1861. Hence, the *Suluk* cannot have been composed before the late 1850s, and, since a printed version of sorts (see n. 36, below) appeared in 1873, we can assume that it was probably completed in the 1860s. The poem was most likely composed in Kedhiri, East Java, well away from the royal courts, and by a member of the small group of literati not by then in Dutch employ.

[36]Carel Poensen, "Een Javaansch geschrift," *Mededeelingen vanwege het Nederlandsche Zendelinggenootschap* 17 (1873):227. The good missionary here gets in a timely jab at Islam's dietary proscriptions.

opium-besotted Javanese mystic!"[37] Not at all, opined the liberal scholar-bureaucrat Rinkes in 1909, the poem was "a serious satire against all that mystagogic rigmarole."[38] Not until 1951 did Philippus van Akkeren, forced by the arrival of Japanese imperialism and the subsequent national revolution of 1945–49 to abandon his missionary labors in East Java, publish the first full text of the *Suluk,* along with a translation, a full critical apparatus, and a thoughtful, anthropologizing thematic analysis.[39]

Only one version has ever been printed in Java—a limited Surabaya edition of 1889, which attracted little attention at the time.[40] But in 1918 the poem became the center of a Java-wide controversy when an article in *Djawi Hiswara,* organ of the Surakarta branch of the Sarékat Islam (Islamic League—the most popular anticolonial movement of the time) cited passages from it, notably one in which the eponymous hero insists that his frequenting of opium dens is in faithful imitation of the Prophet Muhammad. A rancorous debate ensued in the by-then-lively Indonesian- and Javanese-language press, culminating in a huge protest demonstration in Surabaya organized by a hastily formed Army of the Most Reverend Prophet Muhammad. The army, alas, had no weapons, so was forced to content itself with appeals to the governor-general to have the editor of *Djawi Hiswara* criminally prosecuted.[41] After that, the poem went permanently underground—no Indonesian publisher has dared take the risk of being branded religious apostate, or, for reasons described below, pornographer.[42]

What was all the anger about? The plot of the 397-canto *Suluk* is both simple and strange. The first part, covering the meager 13

[37]Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, "De betekenis van den Islâm voor zijne belijders in Oost-Indië," *Verspreide Geschriften* (Bonn and Leipzig: Schröder, 1924), 4:15. This essay originally appeared in 1883.

[38]Douwe Adolf Rinkes, *Abdoerraoef van Singkel* (Heerenveen: "Hepkema," 1909), p. 130.

[39]Philippus van Akkeren, *Een gedrocht en toch de volmaakte mens: A Monster, Yet the Perfect Man* (The Hague: "Excelsior," 1951), p. 1. The citations in n. 33–35 above I have taken from p. 1 of van Akkeren's text.

[40]According to Gerardus Willebrordus Joannes Drewes, "The Struggle between Javanese and Islam as Illustrated by the Serat Dermagandul," *Bijdrage tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 122 (1966):309–65, at 314. Van Akkeren wrote that the one printed version he used for his study was a "second printing" of an edition issued by the well-known Javanophile Sino-Javanese publisher Tan Khoen Swie of Kedhiri. But he gave no date for this printing or for that of its antecedent.

[41]For insulting Islam. The above account is taken from Drewes, "The Struggle," pp. 313–15.

[42]For in the meantime the poem's explicit scatological and sexual language (Poensen's "in the grossest way") was becoming an embarrassment to the emerging Western-educated Javanese middle class, which was determined to make "Javanism" Victorianly respectable in their own eyes and those of the Poensens.

stanzas of cantos 1 and 2, introduces the reader to the hero, Gatholoco, described as the only son of King Suksma Wisésa of Jajar, and his inseparable retainer, Dermagandhul. Appalled by the boy's monstrous and repulsive appearance, the king bids him spend his first sixteen years in isolated meditation, accompanied only by Dermagandhul. Returning home after the sixteen years are up, the lad now has his head "clipped" by his father. But since this rite only makes him more hideous he is sent off for another four years of ascesis, hanging upside down, batlike, in a sacred banyan. This second meditation is rewarded with the gift of matchless skill in language. The king now gives him his adult name of Gatholoco and sends him off to see the world, warning him of a dangerous adversary, the female recluse Perjiwati, who is meditating in a mountain grotto.

The physical description of Gatholoco and Dermagandhul in canto 2, stanzas 3–5, hints openly at what their names make explicit.[43] *Gatholoco* is a compound of *gatho* (penis) and *ngloco* (rub, masturbate); *Dermagandhul* combines *derma* (closely attached) and *gandhul* (hanging down) to denote testicles; while the root of *Perjiwati* is *parji* (female genitalia). In other words, the hero and his attendant are a walking, talking penis-and scrotum, and at one level the poem can be taken as an allegory of a man's sexual development.[44]

The second part, covering the 191 stanzas of cantos 3 to 6, describes Gatholoco's activity on his travels. Between bouts of gambling and visits to opium dens, he engages in a long series of vitriolic debates with "orthodox" Islamic teachers (*guru santri*) on the true nature of divinity, man, the cosmos, Islam, and much else. In every case he triumphs by his wit and depth of ngèlmu. One after another, the guru santri concede defeat and flee his presence in profound humiliation.

[43]"Shaped unlike a normal man / His body shrivelled, shrunk / And scaly, dry his wrinkled skin / Without a nose at all / Or eyes, or ears; his pleasure but / To sleep and sleep, day in, day out, continuously / / Yet once aroused from his deep sleep / Unruly, not to be appeased. . . . Ugly his body, like a sack / His slumber deep beyond compare / When sleeping he was like a corpse / He too had neither eyes nor ears / Merely a pair of lips / Nor thews, nor bones." The Javanese goes: *warnané tan kaprah janmi / wandané apan bungkik / kulité basisik iku / kelawan tanpa nétra / tanpa irung tanpa kuping / remenané anéndra sadina-dina / Yèn ngelilir lajeng monthah / tan kena dèn arih. . . . Awon dedegé lir keba / lèmboné kepati-pati / yèn néndra anglir wong pejah / nora duwé mata kuping / amung ing lambé iki / nora duwé otot-balung.* The spelling in this and other quotations from the *Suluk* has been modernized. The doggerel translation is taken from my English version of the complete poem, published in *Indonesia* 32 (October 1981):108–50, and 33 (April 1982):31–88.

[44]Taken this way, the first part of the poem describes the growth of a male organ/person from latency through the ordeal of circumcision (the "clipping") to mature potency and the prospect of initiation into intercourse.

The third part, covering the 193 stanzas of cantos 7 to 12, depicts Gatholoco's encounter with Perjiwati and her four female attendants. After solving a series of conundrums posed by the five women, he gains entry to Perjiwati's hitherto unpenetrated cave. Dermagandhul attempts to follow, but cannot squeeze in. The motifs of the first part are revived, in that the violent "battles" between Gatholoco and Perjiwati are thinly veiled descriptions of sexual intercourse. After nine months a male child is born, just as hideous as his father, but adored by both parents. The poem then ends with a brief meditation on the meaning of this birth and the nature of life.

The stance and nature of the *Suluk Gatholoco* are best understood in juxtaposition to the *Centhini*. First, one notices the contrast between the two heroes. Sèh Amongraga is a tolerant, gentle paragon of the virtuosi of Old Java.[45] He is handsome, polite, learned, adept in syncretic Javanese (Hindu)-Islamic mysticism, sexually energetic, and cultivated in the traditional arts. He treats the mischievous Cebolang and his troupe with elder-brotherly amusement. Both are solid human beings. Gatholoco is something unique. Not only does he fail to conform to any of the traditional models of Javanese hero (elegant warrior-knight, ascetic sage-priest, Muslim saint, or righteous king), but it is as if he were constructed in deliberate opposition to Amongraga. As canto 2, stanzas 3 and 11, and canto 4, stanzas 1 to 5 reveal, he is a hideous, stinking, foulmouthed, opium-smoking, cantankerous, philosophical, ambulatory penis.

Second, the civilized encyclopedism of the *Centhini* has completely disappeared. Gatholoco and his creator have no interest whatsoever in lists and the multifarious lores that they represent. There is now only one knowledge that matters—the mystical knowledge of the Perfect Male—and Gatholoco expounds and defends it with enraged fanaticism and scabrous, malignant wit. His theological antagonists in the long second part of the poem represent something wholly outside the *Centhini's* dreaming: the oxymoron "false knowledge." The easy syncretism of the previous century, which upheld a flexible mélange of Sufi mysticism and pre-Islamic Hindu-Javanese tradition, has gone up in smoke. It is as if the older culture has broken into violently antagonistic halves: a Mecca-oriented Islamic orthodoxy and what van Akkeren, with some justification, calls a Javanese (cultural) nationalism, back against the wall, fangs bared.

Third, the depiction of sexual life, which is the focus of the poem's

[45] Amongraga's title, Sèh, a Javanized version of *sheikh*, suggests how unselfconsciously in those days Islam and older Javanese traditions were harmoniously blended.

final section, emphasizes, at length and in great detail, everything that the *Centhini* passes over in silence: stink, heat, slime, blood, frustration, pregnancy, and childbirth. Gatholoco has only one (and female) sexual partner, and he mates with her in the most coarse, and even brutal, manner.[46] It is also quite clear that this sexual activity has a single purpose: the procreative reproduction of a new Gatholoco, Perfect Male in embryo, ready one day to replace his father in Java's religious war. Nothing could be further from the playful, spendthrift relationship between religion and sexuality of the *Centhini,* as exemplified by the episode where Cebolang, after a sleepless night of fellatio and mutual masturbation with two santri teenagers, nonchalantly rises to lead the pesantrèn's early morning prayers.[47]

Finally, the phantasmagoric mise-en-scène. The *Centhini*'s elisions have been drastically extended and Perfect Java turned into an eerie moonscape. As before, the Dutch are invisible (though the frequency of Dutch loanwords has markedly increased). The kingdom of Jajar is mentioned only once, in the very first stanza, and its "mighty sovereign" disappears for good after the eleventh. Gone are all the actors, conjurors, musicians, artisans, tradesmen, puppeteers, and rowdy villagers who crowd the *Centhini*'s pages. Gatholoco and Dermagandhul pursue their wanderings utterly alone. Stage lit this way, Java appears as a surreal terrain on which the only landmarks are opium dens, grottoes, mountains, and pesantrèn. An imagined, not an idealized, landscape.

But none of this would, in itself, make the *Suluk Gatholoco* a candidate for "classic." What renders the poem exemplary is first hinted at when the reader learns, in canto 2, stanza 8, that, after four years of meditation upside down in a banyan tree, the young hero "gained the *wahyu* and the skill / To best his fellow-man in words / Unschooled in rhetoric, he knew / The varied arts of argument. Not studying to write / He knew all literary arts."[48] For it is exactly the *Suluk*'s angry, subversive exploitation of "all literary arts" that shows

[46]It should be noted, however, that Perjiwati is fully Gatholoco's equal in the sexual combat. Indeed, Gatholoco is described as ultimately defeated by her (i.e., after intercourse the penis slips limply out of the vagina).

[47]*Serat Tjentini,* canto 37, stanzas 309–28.

[48]The Javanese is: *sinung wahyu bisa nyrékal / iya sesamaning urip / nora sangu ing wicara / sakèhing bicara bangkit / nora sinau nulis / sakèhing sastra pan putus.*

Wahyu is a term usually employed for the mysterious radiance that descends on the head of one destined to be king. That it is used here to signify literary-rhetorical talent suggests the pass to which kingship had fallen in Java by the 1860s, and perhaps hints that Java's only hope lies with its independent literary intelligentsia.

its author as among the desperate last of Old Java's literary professionals.

Take, for example, the opening lines: "The tale to be related here / Concerns a kingdom celebrated / Both far and wide, called Jajar, and / Its mighty sovereign, in war / Valiant, invincible / His royal appellation was / Mahraja Suksma Wisésa / / Great was the King's authority / Submissive were the outer lands."[49] The stanza, by itself, is a standard traditional opening to a narrative poem and should introduce a leisurely, expansive account of the beauties of the royal palace, the prosperity of the realm, and so on. But all this is eliminated, and within eighteen lines we are at the description of Gatholoco as a walking penis. There is an extraordinary insolence in this perfunctoriness (as if to say, "you know as well as I do that in Java today there are no celebrated kingdoms, invincible kings, or submissive outer lands.")

Or take the way in which the author deploys, with easy mastery but for completely untraditional purposes, the evocative alliterations and punning assonances of the *Centhini*'s *haute style*. For example, in canto 5, stanzas 34–35, when his adversaries abuse him as a "tailless dog," Gatholoco turns the tables on them by exploiting the assonance between *asu* (dog) and *asal* (origin, source) to interpret the insult as a deeper truth: that he is in fact the Perfect Male.[50] Again, in canto 4, stanzas 32–33, the hero makes a witty theological retort by playing on the double meaning of *klèlèt* as both "opium-ball" and "turd."[51] It

[49]The Javanese is: *Wonten carita winarni / anenggih ingkang negara / Jajar iku ing naminé / pan wonten ratu digjaya / agagah tur prakosa / jejulukira sang Prabu / Mahraja Suksma Wisésa / Tuhu ratu kinuwasa / kéringan mancanegari.*

[50]My English version is: "Spitefully Ngabdul Jabar said: / 'I'm utterly fed up / Debating with a tailless dog!' / Ki Gatholoco said: / 'That name you gave me is correct / For all my ancestors, through every generation / / Each one of them was tailless, so / That truly none possessed a tail / Now "dog," interpreted, means "source" / While "tailless" indicates that I / Am truly human, with / No tail, unlike your ancestors / You on the other hand / Are who? With shaven, outplucked heads / Are you from Holland, China, Northwest India / / Or are you from Bengal?'" The Javanese is: *Ngabdul Jabar ngucap bengis / apegel ati mami / rembugan lan asu buntung / Gatholoco angucap / bener gonira ngarani / bapa biyung kaki buyut embah canggah / / ya padha buntung sedaya, tan duwé buntut sayekti / basa asu makna asal / buntung iku wis ngarani / ulun jinising jalmi / tan buntut kaya bapakmu / balik sira wong apa / dhasmu gundhul anjedhindhil / apa Landa apa Cina apa Koja / / apa sira wong Benggala.*

[51]"And as for what I eat from day to day / I pick out everything that is most hot / And what is bitterest alone / For thus each turd I drop / Becomes another mountain high / And that is why their peaks / All belch forth smoke / The charred remains are what I eat / (What has become encrusted stone and rock) that is / The *klèlèt* I consume / / In truth, until I drop my burning turds / These mountain peaks have no reality / They'd disappear immediately / If I should once refrain / From dropping turds. Check for yourselves / My truthfulness from what / My anus spouts!" In Javanese: *Kang sun-pangan dhéwé saban ari / ingsun pilih ingkang luwih panas / sarta ingkang pait dhéwé / déné tetinjaningsun / kabèh iki pan dadya*

is hard to convey in English the peculiar, jarring poetry that erupts from the violent bonding of "turds" and "dogs" with the easy flow of traditional literary artifice: a polytonality quite new to Javanese literature. Yet the reader is always aware that this polytonality is deadly serious—neither an idle playing with styles nor a self-conscious satire on classical tradition. Dogs, truth, God, conundrums, opium, Muhammad, turds—none stands in privileged literary relation to the others. The poem's words remain "within the world," parts of its truth. No irony.

The *Suluk*'s polytonality does not end here. One must remember that the poem, like all Javanese poetry before this century, was composed to be sung, if not always aloud, at least under the breath. Its twelve cantos are distinguished from each other less by subject matter than by shifts between the seven musico-metrical forms in which they are variously composed: Asmarandana, Sinom, Mijil, Dhandhanggula, Gambuh, Kinanthi, and Pangkur. These musico-metric forms have had, at least since the start of the nineteenth century, accepted uses: they are felt, by their music, to arouse and reflect distinct moods and to be appropriate for distinct themes and topics.[52] The author of the *Suluk* proceeds, systematically, to disrupt all these conventional associations. Thus, for example, Asmarandana, the meter in which Jajar and Suksma Wisésa's glory is abruptly polished off, is said variously to be "absorbed, sad, mournful, but sad or mournful in the sense of being lovelorn. Suitable for a tale concerned with the pain of love" and "[arousing] sadness."[53] Dhandhanggula, used for the esoteric discussion of turds and opium balls, is "flexible . . . if used for didactic purposes, very clear; if used for the fever of love, attractive," and "supple, pleasurable . . . good for ending a poem." Mijil, understood as "suitable for moral education, but also for a tale of love," is deployed for the first abusive altercation between Gatholoco and the

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ardi / milanya kang prawata / kabèh metu kukus / tumusing geni sun-pangan / ingkang dadi padhas watu lawan curi / kalèlèt kang sun-pangan // sadurungé ingsun ngising tai / gunung iku yekti durung ana / ing bésuk iku sirnané / lamun ingsun wus mantun / ngising tai kang metu silit / lah iya nyatakena / kabèh sakandhaku.

"Turd" here refers to the dross left in an opium pipe after a smoke. "Dropping turds" has thus the esoteric meaning of going into a mystical opium trance.

[52]Behrend, "The Serat Jatiswara," pp. 212–16. For a sophisticated and sensitive treatment of the relationship between Javanese song and poetry, see Martin F. Hatch, "Lagu, Laras, Layang: Rethinking Melody in Javanese Music" (Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1980).

[53]Quoted from S. Padmosoekotjo, *Ngèngrèngan Kasusastran-Djawa* (Yogyakarta: Hien Hoo Sing, 1960), 1:22–23; and R. Hardjowirogo, *Patokaning Njekaraken* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1952), pp. 66–67. The other quotations in this paragraph are drawn from the same two texts.

guru santri. Most striking of all is the fact that canto 5, stanzas 58 and 59, where his adversaries call Gatholoco and his mother "pig's assholes" (*silité babi*), and the hero replies in kind, is composed in Sinom, whose character is, we are told, "friendly, clear" and "suitable for moral instruction."[54]

The effect, in each case, is savagely to rub the written words against the smooth grain of the mellifluous singing voice.[55] The peculiar power of the text comes precisely from the wound it slashes open between form and content. Professional skill of this kind makes one think of a solitary ballerina pirouetting on the rim of a precipice.

Epilogue

Not long after the composition of the *Suluk Gatholoco,* change began to accelerate in colonial Java, spurred above all by the deepening of industrialism in Europe (even in backward Holland) and the revolution in communications. In the early 1870s, the monopolistic Cultivation System was liquidated under pressure of liberal reformers and powerful business interests in the Netherlands. In over the rubble came hordes of planters, merchants, lawyers, physicians, and new-style civil servants. The opening of the Suez Canal hastened their passage, while the extension of telegraphic communication kept them in unprecedentedly close touch with the metropole. A local press began to appear in the 1860s, dominated at first by Dutchmen but soon with increasing Eurasian, Chinese, and native participation.[56] In the 1880s came the railways, intended initially to haul exportable sugar from the vast plantations in the interior of Java, but soon carrying millions of Javanese passengers every year.[57] Alongside them appeared the beginnings of a state-sponsored, state-financed schooling system—for the first time in the by then almost 300 years that Dutchmen had been meddling in the archipelago.[58]

[54]For English and Javanese versions of this passage, see chap. 6, above, p. 212.

[55]A few years ago, as an experiment, I asked a young Javanese poet to "read aloud" this passage, blind, at an informal party. He tried twice, but on each occasion had to stop singing because he was laughing so hard.

[56]See Ahmat B. Adam's fine study, "The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855–1913)" (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1984).

[57]See Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 8–9.

[58]See George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1952), pp. 31–32, for a succinct account of the halting progress of the colonial educational system.

Soon after 1900, signs of a nascent nationalism were clearly visible, fostered by the new types of professionals produced by late colonial capitalism: editors and journalists, mechanics and accountants, school teachers and apothecaries, politicians and surveyors. As the new century wore on, people of this kind became culturally, sociologically, and economically positioned—thanks above all to print and print-capitalism—to undertake the Encyclopédistes' coordination of professional knowledge against the ancien régime in Batavia. The dreams of these professionals, as articulated in the speeches and writings of Sukarno, Dr. Soetomo, Sjahrir, Semaun, and so many others, are familiar enough to us: "Perfect Indonesia"—some short or long way down the yellow brick road.[59] "Perfect Java" and "Perfect Male," however, are today obscure imaginings, all the more so in that the dream of "Perfect Indonesia," like all new forms of consciousness, brought with it its own amnesias. All the more reason, therefore, to take Twain's advice and return to the study of Old Java's ruined maps.

[59]Cf., in this regard, chap. 7, above, p. 267.